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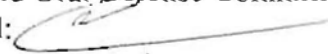
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Marine Corps Intelligence Forecasting:
A Way Forward

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Executive Summary

Title: Marine Corps Intelligence Forecasting: A Way Forward

Author: Emily Mushen, Marine Corps Intelligence Activity

Thesis: The Marine Corps Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance Enterprise must develop a robust forecasting capability that is incorporated into the operational planning cycle. Such an effort will enhance operations-intelligence integration and Marine Corps preparedness for the future challenges.

Discussion:

The challenges that the United States will face in the future will be highly complex and difficult to anticipate. The nation will continue to rely on the Marine Corps as its force in readiness to address crises far from our own borders. Developing a robust forecasting capability will help the force to carry out its mission more effectively, identifying potential problem areas and understanding how best to affect them if directed to do so. The Marine Corps ISR Enterprise has the capacity to develop these forecasts, but it is imperative that it move beyond a delineation of trend analysis toward a more critical and creative examination of possible futures. Developing sound and resilient analytical approaches that reflect the complex and hybrid nature of warfare will form the foundation for a successful forecasting effort.

It is equally necessary to then integrate these forecasts into the Marine Corps operational planning cycle at the strategic and operational levels. Current forecasts in the Enterprise, most notably those at the Marine Corps Intelligence Activity (MCIA) and at Intelligence Department, have made significant strides in this regard, but much remains to be done. MCIA must work diligently to develop working relationships across the staff at the MAGTF and MARFOR levels, ensuring that their vision of the future is folded into and helps to shape thinking among those staffs. Similarly, Intelligence Department assessments must be part of the operational planning rhythm to provide a comprehensive vision for the future and inform strategic-level guidance. Such collaborative exchanges between operations and intelligence functions will also help to direct Enterprise production to better meet the needs of the customer.

Conclusion:

Well-crafted Marine Corps intelligence forecasts will aid in improving operations-intelligence integration, and will grow in authority and value because of it. Without a collaborative effort, forecasts will lose value and operational decision makers will lack unique insights to bolster the integrity their plans. The future is growing in complexity and uncertainty, requiring great depth of thought to understand the challenges ahead. Dedicating the time and resources to futures analysis now will aid in preparing the force to succeed “in every clime and place.”

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THE OPINIONS AND CONCLUSIONS EXPRESSED HEREIN ARE THOSE OF THE INDIVIDUAL STUDENT AUTHOR AND DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT THE VIEWS OF EITHER THE MARINE CORPS COMMAND AND STAFF COLLEGE OR ANY OTHER GOVERNMENTAL AGENCY. REFERENCES TO THIS STUDY SHOULD INCLUDE THE FOREGOING STATEMENT.

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Preface

After ten years of conflict, Marine Corps intelligence has made tremendous progress in helping to produce success on the battlefield. It is imperative to preserve these wartime lessons learned, but it is equally important to invest in developing an understanding of how to assess what will be a complex and uncertain future. As a civilian intelligence analyst at the Marine Corps Intelligence Agency (MCIA), I wrote this paper partly in response to Marine Corps intelligence leadership's recent emphasis on futures analysis, and partly as an outworking of my own interest in how to improve upon what currently exists in my field to prepare for a post-Operation Enduring Freedom security environment. It became increasingly apparent that forecasting will have to play a central role, but it was also clear that forecasts will not have sufficient impact without a more deliberate integration into the operations cycle. While the need for better operations-intelligence integration is not new, forecasting provides a unique avenue for improvement because it is designed to strengthen the relationship between the two before a conflict begins. What I articulate here frames the problem as it stands and offers a way forward. It is not intended to be comprehensive, but rather a starting point to develop stronger forecasting capabilities in Marine Corps intelligence.

I would like to acknowledge several people who helped to shape this work and give it substance. First, my mentor Dr. Adam Cobb provided continual and enthusiastic guidance that propelled me to make a full investment in this project. Several individuals at the MCIA, including its commander, Colonel Dimitri Henry, the Production and Analysis Company Commander Lieutenant Colonel Aaron Bennett, Melissa Burns, and Captain Harold Henderson, contributed insights and guidance throughout the process. At Headquarters Marine Corps, Lieutenant Colonel Drew Cukor and DISL Leila Gardner helped give this paper a vision. Major

Ray Gerber's extensive experience in the field of Marine Corps intelligence served as a weathervane to keep my thoughts and assessments on track.

“Victory smiles upon those who anticipate the changes in the character of war, not upon those who wait to adapt themselves after the changes occur.”

Guilio Douhet, *The Command of the Air*

Introduction

It is an innately human tendency to try to anticipate the future. Uncertainty often leads to discomfort and compels us to make predictions to reduce the impact of the unknown. This reality holds true on the smallest and grandest of scales - from terrorist attacks and declarations of war to weather reports and baseball games, forecasting the future is built into our society and helps to form and inform the decisions we make. It represents a particularly important component in the field of military intelligence. Though not empirical in nature, intelligence forecasting involves a structured approach to thinking about future challenges to and opportunities for American interests. It is not a new concept, particularly in the realm of armed conflict, where uncertainty dominates many of the challenges warfighters face. Carl von Clausewitz understood well this problem, emphasizing that “War is the realm of uncertainty; three quarters of the factors on which action in war is based are wrapped in a fog of greater or lesser uncertainty. A sensitive and discriminating judgment is called for; a skilled intelligence to scent out the truth.”ⁱ Modern American military doctrine reflects Clausewitz’s thinking, stating that

the very nature of war makes certainty impossible; all actions in war will be based on incomplete, inaccurate, or even contradictory information. War is intrinsically unpredictable. At best, we can hope to determine possibilities and probabilities ... By judging probability, we make an estimate of our enemy’s designs and act accordingly. Having said this, we realize that it is precisely those actions that seem improbable that often have the greatest impact on the outcome of war.ⁱⁱ

It is the job of military intelligence analysts - with that “sensitive and discriminating judgment” - to provide leaders with a picture of a potential future operating environment, with its accompanying risks and opportunities, and thereby enable them to make considered judgments.

The United States is entering a period of heightened complexity and uncertainty as it looks toward the end of its missions in Iraq and Afghanistan. Ten years of conflict have come to define the paradigms to which most seasoned military leaders are accustomed. However, the dynamics that will characterize the next decade will be markedly different and necessitate a highly-nuanced understanding of the world. The global threat that al-Qaida and likeminded networks posed is greatly reduced; in the meantime, powerful state actors, such as Iran, Russia, and China, have been growing in influence and pursuing their interests abroad. Simultaneously, localized instability and natural disasters will continue to require a US response. In this complicated and multipolar international environment, the need for thoughtful, pragmatic intelligence forecasts is significant.

Forecasting in the military context remains distinct from that of its civilian strategic partners, just as any analysis in military intelligence differs from the strategic intelligence environment. The latter category is focused on the civilian policymaker and other political leadership as its audience, giving the analysis a perspective that reflects and incorporates overarching political considerations. Several organizations within the American Intelligence Community (IC) are responsible for providing this type of analysis, foremost among them being the Central Intelligence Agency. Military intelligence is in many ways different in its approach. While the level of analysis can be equally as broad - indeed, strategic - analysts write for the military decision maker, who takes direction from political leadership and works within the parameters those leaders set. The audience for military intelligence spans a broad spectrum,

from highest levels of leadership at the Joint Chiefs of Staff to a Company Level Intelligence Cell, but focuses on requirements related to operations rather than policymaking.

However, forecasting can also help to bridge this civil-military gap and create more effective analysis in the process. In an era of hybrid warfare, where conventional and unconventional efforts work in concert and tactical measures can have strategic implications, analysts and decision makers must understand the strategic intelligence context to build useful military intelligence forecasts. In many cases, analysts can no longer rely on developing expertise on a single country, or even single region, as the complexity of hybrid threats increases. Iran's role in Latin America provides a useful example of this phenomenon - two areas that are linked neither by geography nor ideological affinities, yet have been working in concert to achieve their goals. While threats emanating from both areas are distinct to some extent, the developing investment Iran is making in its Latin American partners in the form of funding, training, and expanding influence is concerning - and highly complex. In testimony before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, a senior fellow from the Center for Strategic and International Studies summarized this changing character in warfare well, emphasizing that "this emerging combination of threats comprises a hybrid of criminal- terrorist, and state- and non- state franchises, combining multiple nations acting in concert."ⁱⁱⁱ With such complexities characterizing future warfare, it is vital that forecasting reflects a firm grasp of the implications, opportunities, and risks the nation may face.

To confront these challenges, the United States Marine Corps serves the nation as its "expeditionary force in readiness" - the armed service entrusted with missions requiring rapid response and short-term self-sustaining operations. Even while US policy orients toward the Pacific theater, Marines will continue to respond to challenges across the globe, drawing on their

strengths in amphibious operations in the littorals and along peripheries. Commandant James F. Amos referred to this role as “fill[ing] the void in our Nation’s defense for an agile force that is comfortable operating at the high and low ends of the threat spectrum, or the more likely ambiguous areas in between.”^{iv} In light of this extensive spectrum of operations and the rapidity with which Marines respond to crises, they must strive to understand future operating environments before they are called upon to serve in them, which highlights their need for tailored intelligence forecasts at all levels of Marine Corps leadership. Beyond commentary on the present and vague or linear speculations about the distant future, these forecasts must be comprehensive, exploring complexities and developing specific implications for Marine operations, including risks, challenges, and opportunities. The Marine Corps Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance Enterprise has the capacity, expertise, and access to develop such forecasts. Incorporating a robust intelligence forecasting effort into the operations cycle will enhance Marine Corps preparedness for the challenges ahead.

Conceptual Basis for Marine Corps Forecasts

Forecasting has been a prominent fixture in the field of intelligence analysis in the United States for decades. It has taken many forms and has progressed significantly, but still today many forecasts fail to depict the future with great accuracy. These shortcomings should not be confused with the failure to anticipate singular events, such as the attack on Pearl Harbor or 11 September 2001. Such surprises were more the result of tactical intelligence deficiencies and lack of imagination than a fundamental failure to understand the operating environment. Forecasts find their utility not in fortune telling, but in describing how the complexities that characterize our world will develop and change over time, thus providing decision makers with

context and an understanding of possible implications of actions taken. The Joint Operating Environment (JOE) follows this model, emphasizing that the intent is not to predict, but to “frame the operational and strategic contexts of the future.”^v Still, forecasters must apply particularly high measures of intellectual rigor to their methods to improve the accuracy of their assessments. There is no shortage of tools and approaches to forecasting, and while the merits of each will not be explored in detail here, it is worth highlighting particularly effective methods that lend themselves to military - and specifically Marine - intelligence forecasts. Considering the complexity of the challenges the Marine Corps will face, net assessments and scenario development offer the best approaches to characterize the future operating environment in a way that will be most useful to the operator.

Before addressing these approaches individually, certain qualities should be apparent in all estimative analysis, regardless of method. An intelligence forecast finds its foundation in an underlying geopolitical understanding. This fundamental level of consistency serves as a rudder that steers the analysis and informs any opportunities or threats it might identify. It keeps the analysis focused and enables analysts to assign order and emphasis to risks and challenges. Rather than an aggregation of information projected into the future, a forecast so grounded presents a prioritized view of the environment (be it global, regional, local, etc.).^{vi}

Comprehending geopolitical context in military intelligence is particularly important because it helps preclude the tendency to overlook policy influences - US or otherwise - on decisions with military implications. As discussed earlier, this bridge between strategic intelligence that addresses the policymaker and military intelligence pointed toward the operational leader is important, since policy influences often lie at the root of any armed conflict. Clausewitz’s most famous maxim of war as “policy by other means” still holds true in our modern context and is

vital to understand as a forecaster. Neglecting to establish a geopolitical foundation from the outset risks building a hollow conception of the future.

To develop a useful forecast, the analyst must have a proper and developed understanding of the audience.^{vii} This quality is particularly important in developing forecasts that will be of use to an operational decision maker.^{viii} Marines in intelligence and operations approach challenges from distinct mindsets - the former focusing on how best to accurately characterize the environment and the latter seeking ways to affect it. The Marine intelligence analyst therefore must seek to frame and communicate his assessment in operational language. Accomplishing this end requires a level of consistent partnering and exchange that encourages a mutual understanding between intelligence and operations. This collaboration occurs routinely at the tactical level, where intelligence more directly shapes actions on the ground. However, cultural and bureaucratic constraints can lead strategic and even operational level planners to proceed without input from their intelligence assets, depriving the operational leaders of valuable information and perspective and diminishing the utility of an intelligence assessment. For forecasts to reach their greatest potential, they must focus on the needs of their audience and be incorporated at the earliest planning stages.

It will be helpful here to offer a brief commentary on a very pragmatic aspect of forecasting in the interest of improved operations-intelligence integration. Understanding the interests and equities of an audience also shapes the delivery of a forecast. Communicating the complexities of an operating environment concisely can be a challenging task, but it is an important one - particularly in the Marine Corps context. Operational and strategic planners typically make decisions on an accelerated timetable, which accentuates the need for intelligence forecasts that convey a great deal of information in a manner that is digestible over a relatively

short period of time. Detailed visual depictions can be very helpful in this regard; while not a substitute for well reasoned written assessments, graphics that are constructed effectively offer an important and helpful compliment that bolsters the efficacy of the forecast. Therefore, developing these skills - both effective written communication and visual representation - in Marine intelligence analysts will enhance the quality of their cooperation and collaboration.

Finally, it is paramount that analysts writing forecasts be skilled critical and imaginative thinkers. Contemplating the extensive intricacies required in developing futures analysis necessitates an ability to understand the systemic nature of the world today, where there are systems within systems and multiple layers of complexity. Assessing such complexity requires great precision, and the ability to think critically is indispensable in this effort. Complimenting critical thought is the need for a creative element that anticipates alternatives that break with established patterns, since examining the past does not always provide reliable indicators for how the future will unfold.^{ix} Overcoming what is often a “psychological resistance to thinking about low-probability futures” can be difficult, particularly in military intelligence, where there is great emphasis on adhering to established procedures rather than innovating new approaches to a problem.^x

Marine Intelligence Analysts and Critical and Creative Thinking

Marine Corps intelligence training often predisposes Marines to think in a very bounded fashion, focusing on product generation rather than thought processes. Expectations after training can follow a similar pattern, with heavy emphasis on established outputs, rather than creative thought. Forecasting demands a much broader and nuanced approach. It must involve a comprehension of how systems interact, motivations behind decisions, and similarly complex dynamics. Developing Marine analysts with an appreciation for this layered approach requires a consistent training investment that reinforces and expands on that critical and creative foundation; the result is a much stronger, more authoritative product.

Even with the qualities and skills outlined above, few, if any, analysts have the cognitive capacity to gather, consolidate, organize, and analyze

such vast amounts of information simply by thinking about a problem. Various methods help to add a framework to speculations about the future, giving structured expression to creative and critical thought. The following are method options that lend themselves well to military intelligence forecasting, with a brief look first at one particular (and unfortunately prevalent) method to avoid.

Linear and Trend Analysis

Identifying and analyzing overarching trends in intelligence is one of the most basic approaches to forecasting (and indeed intelligence analysis generally). It involves a detailed examination of the past and present, finding patterns, and projecting them into the future. This method does have some value, but, taken alone, it fails to deliver a sound forecast. Linear analysis can be a helpful tool in formulating a baseline of information. When addressing an environment that is utterly complex, beginning an analysis in this manner will help draw out timelines and determine basic cause and effect relationships. A seasoned analyst will be able to identify patterns - and, more importantly, anomalies - that characterize the environment.^{xi} However, linear analysis lacks much of the critical and creative thought that is essential for valuable forecasting. It rests on the assumption that the trends will continue, or will vary only according to the influences that have been identified.^{xii} History has shown that such an assumption is at best limiting, and at worst dangerous, since it confines the analysis to a formulaic conclusion and does not allow for more innovative considerations. When passed to an operational decision maker, this brand of intelligence is easily cast aside as a regurgitation of known events, trends and possibilities. It is important, therefore, to move beyond this method in useful forecast development.

Scenarios

Analysts have found that one of the most rewarding tools in the field of intelligence forecasting is the use of scenarios. Their earliest formal use in US military planning dates back to the years following World War II.^{xiii} Since that time, they have been woven into the fabric of strategic planning efforts and intelligence analysis, and now constitute a valued approach to developing forecasts. In their guide on structured analytic techniques, Richards J. Heuer and Randolph H. Pherson define scenarios as “plausible and provocative stories about how the future might unfold.”^{xiv} In an effort to avoid a stale and unimaginative quality in analysis, the narratives that scenarios weave are designed to “gather and transform information of strategic significance into fresh perceptions.”^{xv} Developing these perceptions demands an acute understanding of global and regional dynamics, current trends, and multilayered influences that could effect change in a given environment. Consequently, it requires input from specialists across a wide range of disciplines and with a diverse set of experiences.

Many of the challenges that lie ahead for the Marine Corps will be unpredicted, and scenarios are designed to mitigate risks in this kind of uncertainty. Developing intellectually rigorous potential futures expands a leader’s perspective to consider how to address crises if they arise. Owing to a significant appreciation of their value, scenarios appear in estimates throughout the Department of Defense and Intelligence Community. The National Intelligence Council, responsible for providing policymakers with a strategic vision of broad trends in global developments, has released two major assessments in the past ten years that find their foundation in scenario development.^{xvi} Similarly, the Department of Defense’s Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR) “developed insights regarding the ways in which the capabilities of U.S. forces

should evolve by evaluating alternative future forces in a diverse set of scenarios, which depicted a wide range of plausible challenges that might call for a response by U.S. military forces.”^{xvii} Including scenario development in Marine Corps forecasts will help prepare its leaders for the diverse and often unanticipated futures that characterize the mission set for America’s force in readiness.

Opportunity/Implementation Analysis

As already emphasized, no forecast is truly valuable unless it influences the operational decision maker. Consequently, beyond these foundational methods for constructing forecasts, futures assessments must include opportunity analysis if they are to be of maximum utility. This complimentary effort uses descriptive trends to demonstrate where and when opportunities lie.^{xviii} Trend analysis and scenarios can help to paint a picture of the future operating environment, but if the forecast then fails to identify opportunities for the decision maker, it loses applicability and relevance. These considerations are standard procedure in many large businesses. In the 1960s, Stanford Research Institute researcher Albert Humphrey developed a mechanism known as SWOT - strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats - at the behest of several Fortune 500 companies.^{xix} It examines long-range business plans in light of these four aspects, and then examines its competition as well to identify action items. Essentially, Humphrey sought to relate the business plan to the business environment to help determine steps to take. While business forecasting methods do not universally transfer to the security environment, the two share a need to move beyond accumulating information and describe a possible future to identifying the implications for the warfighter (or business planner).

Opportunity analysis serves as an effective platform for this complimentary effort to descriptive analysis.

It is important to note here that including opportunity analysis should not be interpreted as a recommendation for providing prescriptive intelligence that decides policy or operational matters. Rather, it offers an evaluation of a leader's options from a group that is encouraged to think creatively and is less hindered by more traditional biases.^{xx} Indeed, rather than limiting the decision maker to the options presented, opportunity analysis helps to broaden his perspective to consider a more comprehensive range of opportunities, each of which is nested in the wider context of the future operating environment that the forecast conveys. Further, opportunity analysis brings the forecast beyond a regurgitation of material that is often widely available and identifies the implications of those conditions for the forecast audience, along with options to pursue.^{xxi} Without these considerations, the decision maker can lose an appreciation for the value of intelligence forecasting and look to other entities to inform him on areas of concern, exacerbating the operations-intelligence divide.^{xxii}

Net Assessment

The aforementioned methods and tools find their greatest potential impact when used in a combined, layered approach. While the complexity surrounding futures analysis can be daunting, net assessments present the most holistic view of the future operating environment. Broadly defined, a net assessment is “a multidisciplinary approach to national security analysis that is comparative, diagnostic, and forward-looking” and provides “a framework for evaluating the long-term strategic political-military competitions in which states engage.”^{xxiii} Beyond this rather abstract characterization of a net assessment, it will be useful to hone in on its more

tangible aspects in demonstrating the method's utility, particularly for the operational leader. Essentially, in constructing a net assessment, an analyst is weaving a narrative. Similar to scenario development (and, in fact, many net assessments include scenarios), this method seeks to tell the story of a potential future by focusing on qualitative, rather than quantitative, dynamics. An effective net assessments does not resort to formulas to calculate predictions. Instead, it takes what is an increasingly complex environment and applies critical thought from a diverse set of experts to its components. The resulting storyline is dynamic and multifaceted, with many layers of complexity - much like the world it depicts.

Military matters cannot be viewed in isolation and must incorporate a myriad of perspectives from across many disciplines, including broader policy considerations, then synthesized into a comprehensive picture.^{xxiv} Net assessments provide the vehicle to do so effectively, considering the whole of a relationship as more than the sum of its parts.^{xxv} Analysts should be encouraged to draw on every and any resource available, from military counterparts to IC partners to academics. As Robert Tetlock describes, Marine intelligence analysts ought to approach forecasting as what he calls "foxes" - possessing sufficient knowledge over a wide swath of issues, rather than focusing all their energies in a single direction. Tetlock's research found that his so-called "hedgehogs," subject matter experts in their fields, are remarkably unreliable in constructing accurate forecasts.^{xxvi} Rather, it is the foxes who, while they may draw on the expertise of the experts, have the broad knowledge base necessary to synthesize information across those disciplines to produce a holistic view. Marine analysts must be made aware of the resources at their disposal and encouraged to take advantage of them to the fullest extent as they build their forecasts.

Even within the net assessment approach there exist methodological variants. One common approach pieces together a picture involving friendly (“blue”) and enemy (“red”) trends, perceptions, threats, opportunities, and so on.^{xxvii} This “red” aspect is undeniably crucial; considering how an adversary or competitor views the United States can reveal strategic asymmetries that will have a reverberating impact on future actions on either side. However, this bifurcated approach, while it fits nicely into the competitive paradigm with which Americans tend to be most comfortable, oversimplifies the problems we face and limits the potential of the forecast. In particular, it restricts the development of opportunity analysis, since it reduces the problem to two distinct and opposing forces. Once a person, group, or nation is labeled as “red,” certain influence mechanisms become unacceptable and are discounted. Finally, this brand of net assessment tends to adopt a more quantitative perspective on futures analysis, assigning numeric or otherwise quantifiable values to problems and opportunities. This proclivity often fails to account for the more subtle influences hidden under layers of the apparent. It also assigns quantified - and arguably arbitrary - weight to issues and developments, which artificially deflates the complexities involved.

The type of net assessment that is most appropriate and with the greatest potential to yield useful results for the Marine Corps employs a thought process that examines the various layers behind an event, decision, dynamic, etc. It involves a greater reliance on inference, on examining the pressures and forces that are motivating leaders to make the decisions they make, all within a wider geopolitical context. These complexities most often cannot be quantified, but that does not imply that the process of assessing them is inherently less rigorous or reliable. Indeed, these net assessments require great intellectual fortitude and agility because they synthesize such complex sets of information.

The Marine intelligence analyst currently is not trained to think in a manner conducive to building net assessments. Transitioning to this more nuanced approach to analysis will be difficult, but extremely important. The benefit of net assessment in this regard lies in its flexibility. It is not confined to a singular, wrote method; such restriction would defeat its purpose. However, to maximize its utility across such a wide range of talent and skill levels in the Marine Corps, it must be made accessible to an analyst. Therefore, developing a set of tangible and teachable methods for building net assessments that are tailored to Marine Corps interests and equities is crucial to its implementation. Without a solid foundation in understanding how to think, however, net assessment can be easily flattened and lose its more subtle, but most essential, value.

Current Marine Intelligence Forecasts

The Marine Corps consistently relies on forecasts in formulating a strategic vision, informing operational decisions, and improving tactical proficiency. The advocacy here, therefore, is not for initiating forecasting, but institutionalizing it as a facilitator and product of an effective operations-intelligence relationship. To improve upon what already exists and avoid duplication, it is important first to identify current forecasting efforts in the Marine Corps and how they can contribute to this integrated partnership. This assessment will highlight two that are of particular significance, owing to their scope and customer base.^{xxviii}

Marine Corps Intelligence Activity: Long Range Threat Assessment

The Marine Corps Intelligence Activity (MCIA) is the service-level intelligence organization for the Marine Corps, designed to provide “comprehensive intelligence for

expeditionary mission sets.”^{xxxix} As a member of the broader Intelligence Community (IC), MCIA also produces for, coordinates with, and leverages assets available in other intelligence agencies. Echoing direction from Marine Corps Commandant General James F. Amos in his Marine Corps Vision and Strategy 2025, MCIA is seeking to “devote attention to tomorrow’s threats and opportunities,” and consequently has adopted an increased focus on forecasting.^{xxx} The foundation for this effort is the Long Range Threat Assessment (LRTA), which examines global trends and makes estimative judgments on the operating environment 5 to 20 years in the future.^{xxxi} Included in the LRTA are several aspects of forecasting described earlier, to include trend analysis, opportunity analysis, and scenario development.^{xxxii}

The identified audience for the LRTA is broad and includes planning, operations, and support personnel. In actual practice, the LRTA has been most influential with the Strategic Vision Group, an office that provides the Commandant and senior staff with assessments on the future operating environment to determine force implications for the Marine Corps.^{xxxiii} This focus on providing input in supporting establishment planning considerations (manpower, acquisitions, training, etc.) was central to MCIA’s initial mission when it was first established and continues today.^{xxxiv} While it will not be addressed in depth here, this application of intelligence forecasting represents an important component in ensuring that Marines are prepared to fight the battles ahead.

The LRTA incorporates many of the attributes of intelligence forecasts outlined earlier. Covering a formidable amount of information, the assessment is concise and uses language that resonates with those outside the intelligence field. It includes sections for each geographic region that identify “potential roles and missions” for the Marine Corps, which is particularly significant and must inform the focus of the analysis.^{xxxv} In addition, the LRTA highlights the

engagement potential in each of the regions, building on an outline of how Marines might be involved in a given area. While the assessment briefly addresses possible crisis scenarios for each region, they tend to be vague and underdeveloped, which limits their utility. Perhaps most essential to future iterations of the LRTA is a running narrative that underpins and puts into context the information presented, bringing it beyond the descriptive toward a fully-integrated synthesis.

Director of Intelligence Five-Year Forecast

For the first time, the Marine Corps Director of Intelligence (DIRINT) has also released a forecast produced by his Intelligence Futures and Assessments Branch at Headquarters Marine Corps Intelligence Department. It is unique in its approach in several aspects and serves as a helpful guide in both product and process. The DIRINT's forecast is intended to help inform the Commandant and his senior staff of the strategic future our nation faces, framing Marine Corps interests in a global context. Consequently, it adopts a broad perspective in its outlook, bases its analysis on a geopolitically realist outlook, and uses the net assessment process to bring clarity and perspective to the future operating environment. A tiered view of conflict relegates various regions, countries, and issues into four categories: existential challenges (those that threaten the existence of the United States, such as nuclear war); global critical challenges; regional critical challenges; and local instability and crisis challenges. This approach helps to frame future problems and opportunities in the appropriate strategic context. Additionally, the forecast offers specific opportunity analysis directed toward each of the areas of concern, incorporating an operations perspective that allows the analysis to address relevant equities.

Way Forward

Developing effective integration between operations and intelligence in the construction and use of forecasts is imperative. Accomplishing this task with the greatest efficacy will require a level of coordination that is not necessarily inherent to that relationship and necessitates deliberate outreach. Intelligence Marines must work to sync their efforts with the operational “battle rhythm.” Too often, intelligence assessments are reactive in nature, working to catch up with operational demands, or they follow a timeline that runs parallel - but rarely crosses - operational schedules. Forecasts are rendered virtually useless in this environment. They must be developed in concert with operations, identifying areas of convergence and divergence in continual exchanges so that when commanders communicate their vision - be it the Commandant or a MEU commander - his perspective reflects this dialogue and is stronger for it. This adjoined effort will adopt distinct qualities at the various levels of Marine Corps leadership, but ultimately will be the propulsion that results in useful forecasts that help to shape Marine operations.

MCIA

The LRTA will continue to form the substructure of MCIA’s forecasting efforts, and ensuing forecasting products will nest within this overarching framework. These forward-looking assessments will find their primary audience in the Combatant Commands (COCOMs) and Marine Air-Ground Task Forces (MAGTFs). All analysts should engage with these commands and units persistently to develop an accurate picture of how they are structured, how they function, and how they may be employed. Their analysis ought to reflect this perspective with a developed set of risks and opportunities that the force may face in their area of operations. As outlined by Marine Corps intelligence leaders, the goal for the Marine Corps

Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance Enterprise is a synergistic intelligence system across all echelons and functions.^{xxxvi} However, this integration must extend beyond intelligence elements to include operations as well.

MCIA's Geographic Combatant Command Working Groups (GCCWG) serve as an effective vehicle for coordination with the MARFORs. The current structure is based in established relationships with MARFOR intelligence sections that facilitates consistent exchange. This collaboration must continue to grow in extent and quality. MCIA, through the GCCWG, should provide input to the MARFOR planning processes on a continual basis that parallels their operational planning cycles. This level of integration will be difficult without the benefit of colocation, but it is crucial nevertheless. Analysts should be looking ahead to assist planners in determining where MARFOR contributions will be most effective, rather than reacting to operations already underway. The GCCWGs have developing relationships with the MARFOR intelligence sections, but this influence must expand to include planning and assessments to maximize its utility.

At the MAGTF level, MCIA must leverage the relationships it has built over the past ten years in supporting MEFs, MEBs, and MEUs deployed in Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom. The command's reach and reputation has grown tremendously in a decade, and it must now work to translate that valued support to a new postwar context. Forecasting's import will only increase in the coming years, as the Marine Corps remains ready to respond to crises anywhere. MCIA must work with the planning staffs of deploying units in a formal capacity to bring its analysis into discussions on future threats and opportunities. The range of these assessments should be shorter than the LRTA, providing MAGTFs with a near-term outlook that reflects the same adherence to forecasting fundamentals but examines the

immediate impact of Marine operations, identifies opportunities to make those operations most effective, and clarifies risks that could alter the operating environment.

This collaboration with MARFOR and MAGTF leadership will also inform MCIA's analysis, helping to identify production requirements and shape analysts' perspectives on the operating environment. For example, the MARFORs recently provided input to the Enterprise Production Plan, which lays out Marine Corps intelligence production efforts each year.^{xxxvii} That contribution better informed MCIA's own planning processes and enhanced its potential for future relevance to the operating forces. Similarly, consistent analyst exchanges with their counterparts in the fleet widen the aperture of MCIA analysis to ensure that it reflects the most current dynamics at play. This continuing effort to sync operational and intelligence planning, therefore, must be a two-way exchange.

Finally, MCIA forecasts must adopt a durable and grounded method that reflects the critical and creative thinking so crucial to effective assessments. Again, the net assessment model will be especially effective, enabling analysts to highlight and characterize complexities and systems at play around the globe. MCIA has already implemented several measures that compliment the net assessment approach, including extensive instruction in logic and critical thought. Expanding this instruction to include the full range of net assessment skills and techniques will equip analysts, civilian and Marine, to produce more constructive analysis. Such an investment will pay dividends in the future as well. Civilians help to provide continuity at MCIA and across the Enterprise, while Marine analysts will carry their skills back to the fleet and thereby enhance continuing integration.

DIRINT's Forecast

The DIRINT's forecast in many ways presents a model for effective operations-intelligence integration as it applies to futures analysis, though it requires further development and refining. In the effort to integrate into the operations cycle, analysts have met regularly with representatives from Headquarters Marine Corps' (HQMC) Plans, Policies and Operations (PP&O) to conduct exchanges on the content of the forecast and its implications for the operating forces. While highly valuable, these meetings are in their most nascent stages and do not yet represent a formalized step in the analytic process. Establishing them as such is essential to facilitate continued cooperation. The DIRINT's forecast must align with and be folded into the development of HQMC's major strategy documents and proceedings, informing and bolstering the Commandant's guidance, high-level wargames, and similar strategic outputs.

The first iteration of the DIRINT's forecast was released in January 2012, and the method analysts used to develop it will continue to evolve and strengthen. Using the net assessment method, the analysis presents a prioritized view of the world, focusing on areas that will be most important for leaders to consider. In this approach the forecast finds one of its greatest strengths, as it moves beyond a mere aggregation of information in an effort to maximize its utility for the decision maker. Although the current version does not include scenarios, incorporating them into subsequent forecasts will add an important and useful dimension, particularly in the forecast's potential contribution to strategic wargaming. Because this forecast is currently in its formative stages, there are ample opportunities to explore innovative approaches that build on the net assessment framework. However, it will be increasingly important to focus on formalizing its role at HQMC to ensure that it has an enduring impact on strategic decision making.

Beyond Ops-Intel Integration: Role of Multinational and Interagency Partners

Years of operating in Iraq and Afghanistan alongside interservice, international and interagency partners has helped to solidify the understanding that Marines will not approach future challenges alone. In his Service Campaign Plan 2009-2015, former Commandant James T. Conway outlined six core competencies for the Marine Corps. Among these is a call to “lead joint and multinational operations and enable interagency activities.”^{xxxviii} This reality adds potential capacity and complexity to any planning effort, and here Marine intelligence forecasts must offer support to planners and weave these concerns into their narratives. Alongside the aforementioned collaboration with operators to better integrate estimative intelligence considerations into an operational plan, analysts must also leverage the considerable resources at their disposal to provide insights on how these other players may be involved in any contingency.

At the highest levels, the DIRINT’s forecast should bring the strategic significance of these joint, multinational and interagency contributors to bear on its analysis, understanding the potential impact that such partners may have on operational decisions. Likewise, MCIA has established relationships with much of the US interagency, well beyond the IC, and must consult with these partners when drawing up forecasts in support of MARFORs and MAGTFs. Operations in Afghanistan in particular have demonstrated the importance of combined endeavors with US allies. Geopolitical trends suggest that such cooperation will only increase in frequency and importance in years to come. Furthermore, US policy will continue to press for a “whole of government” approach to international challenges. Marine futures analysts must therefore strive to integrate this perspective into their assessments, providing planners with indications of how these other elements may be employed and how their employment may alter

the operating environment. This forward-looking support will enhance interoperability before an operation begins, anticipating the need rather than reacting and having to adapt to it.

Conclusion

The Marine Corps is entering a time of greater complexity and ambiguity as our mission in Afghanistan nears its end. It is certain, however, that the nation will continue to rely on its expeditionary force-in-readiness to respond to challenges abroad with swift and adaptable capabilities. Having a developed and considered conception of the future operating environment is central to preparatory efforts to meet these coming challenges, and it is the responsibility of Marine intelligence to envision that future. The Enterprise is postured to take on this role, but its various components must approach this mandate with humility and depth of thought, approaching forecasting as a mindset, rather than a product. Efficacy depends on deliberate and consistent collaboration with operational counterparts to bring operations and intelligence into a productive balance. This integrated effort will result in far more authoritative forecasts that provide Marine leaders with a useful context to frame their decisions and prepare the force to meet the challenges ahead.

ⁱ Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, ed. Michael Howard and Peter Paret, trans. Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984), 101.

ⁱⁱ Headquarters U.S. Marine Corps, *Warfighting*, MCDP 1 (Washington, DC: U.S. Marine Corps, June 20, 1997), 7.

ⁱⁱⁱ Senate Committee on Foreign Relations. Western Hemisphere, Peace Corps, and Global Narcotics Affairs Subcommittee. Iran's Influence and Activity in Latin America: Testimony of Douglas Farah, Senior Fellow, International Assessment and Strategy Center, 112 Cong., 2nd sess., February 16, 2012, 4.

^{iv} General James F. Amos, "Prepared Remarks for the George P. Shultz Lecture" (lecture, Marine Memorial Club, San Francisco, CA, February 8, 2011).

^v U.S. Joint Forces Command, *The Joint Operating Environment 2010* (Washington, DC: February 18, 2010), 4.

^{vi} LtCol Drew Cukor, interview with author.

^{vii} Francis Fukuyama, ed., *Blindside: How to Anticipate Forcing Events and Wild Cards in Global Politics* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2007), 94-7.

^{viii} For the whole of this assessment, the terms "operations" and "operational" refer to the S-3, G-3, or J-3 section of a staff.

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- ^{ix} Richard K. Betts and Thomas G. Mahnken, eds., *Paradoxes of Strategic Intelligence* (London: Frank Cass Publishers, 2003), 90.
- ^x Fukuyama, 4.
- ^{xi} Gary Klein, *Sources of Power: How People Make Decisions* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1998), 149-51.
- ^{xii} Betts and Mahnken, 90-1.
- ^{xiii} Peter Schwartz, *The Art of the Long View: Planning for the Future in an Uncertain World* (New York: Doubleday, 1996), 7.
- ^{xiv} Richards J. Heuer and Randolph H. Pherson, *Structured Analytic Techniques* (Washington, DC: CQ Press, 2011), 119.
- ^{xv} Schwartz, *Long View*, 37.
- ^{xvi} These two assessments are the National Intelligence Council's Mapping the Global Future: Report of the National Intelligence Council's 2020 Project and their Global Scenarios to 2025. These publications can be accessed at the NIC's open source website (http://www.dni.gov/nic/NIC_home.html).
- ^{xvii} Department of Defense, *Quadrennial Defense Review Report*, (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Defense, February 2010), 17.
- ^{xviii} Cukor, interview with the author.
- ^{xix} Brett Michael Baker, "A Conceptual Framework for Making Knowledge Actionable through Capital Formation," (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Maryland University College, 2007), 65.
- ^{xx} Director of Intelligence, *A Compendium of Analytic Tradecraft Notes*, Volume 1 (October 1995), 34.
- ^{xxi} Paul Miller, "Working for the War Czar: Lessons for Intelligence Support to Policymaking During Crises," *Studies in Intelligence* 54, no. 2 (June 2010): 7.
- ^{xxii} Headquarters U.S. Marine Corps, *Intelligence*, MCDP 2 (Washington, DC: U.S. Marine Corps, June 1997), 82-4.
- ^{xxiii} Thomas M. Skypek, "Evaluating Military Balances Through the Lens of Net Assessment: History and Application," *Journal of Military and Strategic Studies* 12, no. 2 (Winter 2010), 3.
- ^{xxiv} Skypek, 6.
- ^{xxv} Skypek, 23.
- ^{xxvi} Philip E. Tetlock, *Expert Political Judgment* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005).
- ^{xxvii} Paul Bracken, "Net Assessment: A Practical Guide," *Parameters* 36, no. 1 (Spring 2006), 93.
- ^{xxviii} This thesis addresses formal Marine Corps intelligence forecasts at the strategic and operational levels, but is not meant to be comprehensive in including every futures assessment the Enterprise or other Marine entities produce. It is important to consider the role of forecasts at the tactical level, and even those ad hoc operational and strategic forecasts. These, however, are beyond the scope of this paper.
- ^{xxix} "MCIA After Afghanistan," *Marine Corps Intelligence Activity*, November 2011, 8.
- ^{xxx} Commandant of the Marine Corps, *Marine Corps Vision and Strategy 2025*, PCN 50100654800, June 2008, 1.
- ^{xxxi} This thesis references the 2008 version of the LRTA.
- ^{xxxii} Emily Jackson, interview with the author.
- ^{xxxiii} Marine Corps Combat Development Command, *Strategic Vision Group*, <http://www.quantico.usmc.mil/activities/?Section=SVG>.
- ^{xxxiv} Leila Gardner, interview with the author.
- ^{xxxv} Jackson interview.
- ^{xxxvi} Colonel Dimitri Henry, interview with the author.
- ^{xxxvii} LtCol Aaron Bennett, interview with the author.
- ^{xxxviii} "Six Core Competencies: Lead Joint and Multinational Operations and Enable Interagency Activities," *Quantico Sentry*, February 2010, <http://www.quantico.usmc.mil/Sentry/StoryView.aspx?SID=3865> (accessed February 23, 2012).

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